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## Hercules Saves Christmas in Orinda

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Mackenzie Phillips, Hercules and Max Photos provided

A dog, a boy, and Christmas-what's not to like? The mighty combination is working well for producers Derek Zemrak and Leonard Pirkle as they prepare to unleash the red carpet World Premier of Hercules Saves Christmas November 17 at the Orinda Theatre.

The movie was shot last winter in Lamorinda (<http://tinyurl.com/3w6pcju>) with a local supporting cast and film crew. It features Animal Planet's Pit Boss dog star Hercules. Human actors include Mackenzie Phillips, Danny Arroyo, Kathy Garver, Maggie VandenBerghe and Richard Van Vleet. Hercules' film voice belongs to owner Shorty Rossi, who has a cameo role as a priest in the film. Zemrak says the most difficult part of production was accommodating Rossi's schedule.

The story idea came about while the two were attending another premier in Hawaii. The script: orphan Max (played by South Bay local Anthony Robinson) meets a talking dog (Hercules) who works for Santa. Max and Hercules go to San Francisco, where they encounter a pack of toy-stealing dogs and evil humans. Only Max can see Hercules, and Hercules can only speak when wearing his magic collar. Add some elves to the magic, stir in comedy and suspense, and you've got a movie Animal Planet has already snapped up (it airs December 3).

Celebrities arrive at 6:30 p.m.; the movie premieres at 7:00 p.m., with a Q&A to follow. Hercules then moves to Moraga's New Rheem Theatre, where it will play for a week. The movie's trailer is available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leqdNPmfYdU>. Dog, elf and Christmas lovers will be delighted to know Zemrak's already thinking ahead to a sequel.



Dana Michael Woods (background: Anthony Robinson as "Max")

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